

**James Madison to Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch
Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, November 25,
1820. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison,
ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons,
1900-1910.**

TO MARQUIS DE LA FAYETTE. MAD. MSS.

Montpellier, Novr. 25, 1820

I have received, my dear friend, your kind letter of July 22, inclosing your printed opinion on the Election project. It was very slow in reaching me.

I am very glad to find, by your letter, that you retain, undiminished the warm feelings of friendship so long reciprocal between us; and, by your "opinion," that you are equally constant to the cause of liberty so dear to us both. I hope your struggles in it will finally prevail in the full extent required by the wishes, and adapted to the exigencies of your Country.

We feel here all the pleasure you express at the progress of reformation on your Continent. Despotism can only exist in darkness, and there are too many lights now in the political firmament, to permit it to reign any where, as it has heretofore done, almost every where. To the events in Spain & Naples has succeeded already, an auspicious epoch in Portugal. Free States seem indeed to be propagated in Europe, as rapidly as new States are on this side of the Atlantic: Nor will it be easy for their births or their growths if safe from dangers within to be strangled by external foes, who are not now sufficiently united among themselves, are controuled by the aspiring sentiments of their people, are without

Library of Congress

money of their own, and are no longer able to draw on the foreign fund which has hitherto supplied their belligerent necessities.

Here, we are, on the whole, doing well, and giving an example of a free system, which I trust will be more of a Pilot to a good Port, than a Beacon

warning from a bad one. We have, it is true, occasional fevers, but they are of the transient kind flying off thro' the surface, without preying on the vitals. A Govt. like ours has so many safety-valves giving vent to overheated passions, that it carries within itself a relief agst. the infirmities from which the best of human Institutions cannot be exempt. The subject which ruffles the surface of public affairs most at present, is furnished by the transmission of the "Territory" of Missouri from a state of nonage to a maturity for self-Govt. and for a membership in the Union. Among the questions involved in it, the one most immediately interesting to humanity is the question whether a toleration or prohibition of slavery Westward of the Mississippi, would most extend its evils. The humane part of the argument against the prohibition, turns on the position, that whilst the importation of slaves from abroad is precluded, a diffusion of those in the Country, tends at once to meliorate their actual condition, and to facilitate their eventual emancipation. Unfortunately, the subject which was settled at the last session of Congress, by a mutual concession of the parties, is reproduced on the Arena, by a clause in the Constitution of Missouri, distinguishing between free persons of Colour, and white persons; and providing that the Legislature of the new State shall exclude from it the former. What will be the issue of the revived discussion is yet to be seen. The case opens the wider field as the Constitutions & laws of the different States are much at variance in the civic character given to free people of colour; those of most of the States, not excepting such as have abolished slavery, imposing various disqualifications which degrade them from the rank & rights of white persons. All these perplexities develop more & more the dreadful fruitfulness of the original sin of the African trade.

Library of Congress

I will not trouble you with a full Picture of our economics. The cessation of neutral gains, the fiscal derangements incident to our late war, the inundation of foreign merchandizes since, and the spurious remedies attempted by the local authorities, give to it some disagreeable features. And they are made the more so, by a remarkable downfall in the prices of two of our great Staples Breadstuffs & Tobacco, carrying privations to every man's door, and a severe pressure to such as labour under debts for the discharge of which, they relied on crops & prices which have failed. Time however will prove a sure Physician for these maladies. Adopting the remark of a British Senator applied with less justice to his Country, at the commencement of the revolutionary Contest, we may say, that "altho' ours may have a sickly countenance, we trust she has a strong Constitution."

I see that the bickerings between our Govts. on the point of tonnage has not yet been terminated. The difficulty, I should flatter myself, cannot but yield to the spirit of amity, & the principles of reciprocity entertained by the parties.

You would not, believe me, be more happy to see me at Lagrange, than I should be to see you at Montpr. where you wd. find as zealous a farmer, tho' not so well cultivated a farm as Lagrange presents. As an interview can hardly be expected to take place at both, I may infer from a comparison of our ages a better chance of your crossing the Atlantic than of mine. You have also a greater inducement in the greater number of friends whose gratifications would at least equal your own. But if we are not likely to see

one another, we can do what is the next best, communicate by letter what we wd. most wish to express in person, and particularly can repeat those sentiments of affection & esteem, which, whether expressed or not, will ever be most sincerely felt by your old & steadfast friend.